Lord of the Flies

Lord of the Flies is a novel by Nobel Prize-winning author William Golding about a group of British schoolboys stuck on a deserted island who try to govern themselves, with disastrous results. Its stances on the already controversial subjects of human nature and individual welfare versus the common good earned it position 68 on the American Library Association's list of the 100 most frequently challenged books of 1990–1999.[1] In 2005, the novel was chosen by *Time* magazine as one of the 100 best English-language novels from 1923 to 2005[2] and was awarded a place on both lists of Modern Library 100 Best Novels, reaching #41 on the editor's list, and #25 on the reader's list.

Published in 1954, *Lord of the Flies* was Golding's first novel. Although it was not a great success at the time—selling fewer than 3,000 copies in the United States during 1955 before going out of print—it soon went on to become a bestseller, and by the early 1960s was required reading in many schools and colleges. It was adapted to film in 1963 by Peter Brook, and again in 1990 by Harry Hook.

Background

The book subtly indicates that it takes place in the midst of an unspecified nuclear war, perhaps implicitly relating the savagery of the children characters to the warfare of adults. Some of the marooned characters are ordinary students, while others arrive as a musical choir under an established leader. Most (with the exception of the choirboys) appear never to have encountered each other before. The book portrays their descent into savagery; left to themselves in a paradisaical country, far from modern civilization, the well-educated children regress to a primitive state:

At an allegorical level, the central theme is the conflicting impulses toward civilization—live by rules, peacefully and in harmony—and towards the will to power. Different subjects include the tension between groupthink and individuality, between rational and emotional reactions, and between morality and immorality. How these play out, and how different people feel the influences of these, form a major subtext of *Lord of the Flies*.[3]

[edit] Plot summary

In the midst of a wartime evacuation a British plane crashes on an isolated island. The only survivors are male children below the age of 16.[4] Two boys, the fair-haired Ralph and an overweight, bespectacled boy reluctantly nicknamed "Piggy" find a conch which Ralph uses as a horn to bring all the survivors to one area. Two dominant boys emerge during the meeting: Ralph and Jack Merridew, a redhead who is the leader of a choir group that was among the survivors. Ralph is voted chief, losing only the votes of Jack's fellow choirboys. Ralph asserts two goals: have fun, and work toward rescue by maintaining a constant fire signal. They create the fire with Piggy's glasses, and, for a time, the boys work together.

Jack organizes his choir group into the group's "hunters", who are responsible for hunting for meat. Ralph, Jack, and a black-haired boy named Simon soon becomes the supreme trio among the children. Piggy, the most sensible of the bunch, is quickly outcast by his fellow "biguns" (older boys) and becomes an unwilling source of mirth for the other children. Simon, in addition to supervising the project of constructing shelters, feels an instinctive need to protect the younger boys.

The original semblance of order imposed by Ralph quickly deteriorates as the majority of the boys turn idle. Around the same time, many of the younger boys begin to believe that the island is inhabited by a monster, referred to as "the beast". Jack gains control of the discussion by boldly promising to kill the beast. At one point, Jack summons all of his hunters to hunt down a wild pig, including those who were supposed to be maintaining the fire. A ship approaches, but passes by because the signal fire has gone out. Although the

hunting of the pig turns out to be the hunters' first successful catch, Ralph is infuriated that they have missed a potential rescue. Later, Ralph envisages relinquishing his position, though Piggy discourages him from doing so while the two of them and Simon yearn hopefully for some guidance from the adult world.

After Sam and Eric report possibly seeing the beast atop a mountain, Ralph and Jack investigate; they encounter the corpse and the open parachute of a fighter pilot who has landed on the island and mistake it as "the beast" asleep. Jack assembles the children with the conch and confirms the beast's existence to them. The meeting results in a schism, splitting the children into two groups. Ralph's group focuses on preserving the signal fire. Jack becomes the chief of his own tribe, which focuses on hunting while exploiting the iron-clad belief in the beast. As Jack and the hunters have already slain their first pig, they offer promises of meat, fun, and protection from the beast. Jack's tribe gradually becomes more animalistic, applying face paint to liberate their inner savages while they hunt. The face paint becomes a motif which recurs throughout the story, with more and more intensity toward the end.

Simon, a part of Ralph's tribe, who had "cracked" and gone off looking for the beast by himself, finds the head of the hunters' dead pig on a stick, left as an offering to the beast. Simon envisions the pig head, swarming with scavenging flies, as the "Lord of the Flies" and believes that it is talking to him. Simon hears the pig identifying itself as the real "Beast" and disclosing the truth about itself—that the boys themselves "created" the beast, and that the real beast was inside them all. Simon also locates the dead parachutist who had been mistaken for the beast, and is the sole member of the group to recognize that it is a cadaver instead of a sleeping monster. Simon attempts to alert Jack's tribe that the "beast" is nothing more than a cadaver. While trying to tell Jack's tribe of this fact, Simon is caught in a ring during a primal dance and Jack's tribe stabs him to death, with Ralph, Piggy, Sam, and Eric in the ring also. Ralph, Piggy, Sam, and Eric later try to convince themselves that they did not take part in the murder.

Jack's tribe then raids Ralph's camp to steal Piggy's glasses. Ralph's tribe journeys to Jack's tribe at Castle Rock to try to retrieve the glasses. In the ensuing confrontation, Roger drops a boulder on Piggy, killing him, and the conch is shattered. Sam and Eric are captured and tortured into joining Jack's tribe. Ralph is forced to flee.

The following morning, Jack leads his tribe on a manhunt for Ralph. However, the fire and smoke attracts the attention of a nearby warship. Then a naval officer lands on the island near where Ralph is lying, and his sudden appearance brings the children's fighting to an abrupt halt. Upon learning of the boys' activities, the officer remarks that he would have expected better from British boys, initially believing them only to be playing a game. In the final scene, although now certain he will be rescued after all, Ralph cries.

[edit] Allegorical relationships

[edit] Ralph

When he and the others arrive on the island, Ralph quickly becomes the chief of the group, not by any harsh, overt or physical action, but by being elected[5]. Ralph is described as having "the directness of genuine leadership" [6]. Ralph's first big decision is that they have "got to decide if this is an island" [7]. After Ralph, Jack, and Simon discover that they are truly "on an uninhabited island"[8], Ralph suggests that a fire be lit because "if a ship comes near the island they may not notice us"[9]. However, towards the end of the book he forgets the initial reason for maintaining the fire. This is representative of the debilitating effects corruption has even on the brightest mind. Ralph may seem to mean well, but often his obsession with being popular overcomes him and he resorts to bullying Piggy to regain his power. Still, in the midst of all the island's chaos, it should be noted that Ralph has a tendency to be polite and logical in the tensest of moments; for example, when the children are obliged to investigate Castle Rock, Ralph takes the lead despite being horribly afraid of the "beast". Ralph is sometimes percieved as partially being a literary tool to aid the audiences realisation of inner evil throught the duration of the novel; "Ralph wept for the end of innocence...".

Ralph embodies good intentions in the implementation of reason, but ultimately fails to execute these plans soundly. Ralph's refusal to resort to violence throughout the novel is counterpoised by Jack's inherent love of violence. Beginning with his self nomination to be Ralph's hunter, Jack eventually degenerates into the beast he is consumed with slaying. Eventually, towards the end of the story, Jack abandons the tribe and forms one of his own. His darkly irresistible nature, along with the lure of meat, immediately sways the majority of the island dwellers to his tribe, which is a much more violent group. Jack's insurrection begins a chain of events that drives the island further into chaos, initially resulting in the frenzied mob's murdering Simon during a primal dance, and then culminating with the murder of Piggy by Roger as the group attempts to hunt down Ralph.[10]

[edit] Piggy

Piggy is the intellectual with poor eyesight, a weight problem, and asthma[11]. Despite his greater intelligence, he is the most physically vulnerable of all the boys. Piggy represents an adult figure and the rational world. By frequently quoting his aunt, he also provides the only female voice.

Piggy's intellect benefits the group only through Ralph; he acts as Ralph's advisor. He cannot be the leader himself because he lacks leadership qualities and has no rapport with the other boys. Piggy also relies too heavily on the power of social convention. He believes that holding the conch gives him the right to be heard. He believes that upholding social conventions produces results.

As the brainy representative of civilization, Piggy asserts that "Life...is scientific" [12]. Ever the pragmatist, Piggy complains, "What good're you doing talking like that?"[13] when Ralph brings up the highly charged issue of Simon's death at their hands. Piggy tries to keep life scientific despite the incident, "searching for a formula"[14] to explain the death. He asserts that the assault on Simon was an accident and justifiable because Simon asked for it by inexplicably crawling out of the forest into the ring[15].

Piggy is so intent on preserving some remnant of civilization on the island that, after Jack's tribe attacks Ralph's group, he assumes they "wanted the conch"[16], when, in fact, they have come for Piggy's glasses[17] in order to make fire. Even up to the moment of his death, Piggy's perspective does not shift in response to the reality of their situation. He can't think as others think or value what they value. Because his eminently intellectual approach to life is modeled on the attitudes and rules of the authoritative adult world, he thinks everyone should share his values and attitudes as a matter of course. When Ralph and Piggy confront Jack's tribe about the stolen spectacles, Piggy asks "Which is better -- to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill? [...] law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?"[18] as if there is no doubt that the boys would choose his preference.

[edit] The Conch

When first blown, it calls the children to an assembly, where Ralph is elected leader. They also agree that only the boy holding the conch may speak at meetings to forestall arguments and chaos, and that it should be passed around to those who wish to voice their opinion. The conch symbolizes democracy and, like Ralph, civility and order within the group. However, when Piggy is killed, the conch is smashed into pieces at the same time[19]. Therefore, the conch's destruction signals the end of order and the onset of chaos.[3] Originally the conch is portrayed as a being very vibrant and colorful, but as the novel progresses, its colors begin to fade, the same way society begins to fade on the island.

[edit] Jack Merridew

Jack epitomizes the worst aspects of human nature when unrepressed or untempered by society. Like Ralph, Jack is a natural leader. However, unlike Ralph, Jack appeals to more primal desires in the children and relies on his status as leader of the choirboys (presumably ordained by the adults) to justify his authority. Although his way of behaving is neither disruptive nor violent at the beginning of the book, he does, at that time, express an unquenchable desire to hunt and kill a pig and spends hours in solitude traversing the island.

This insatiable desire is kindled after the first time Jack is presented with killing a pig and cannot "because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh; because of the unbearable blood"[20]. After this hesitation, for which he is most ashamed, Jack's blood lust grows more and more irrational, to the point where he abandons the fire (and causes the boys to miss a potential rescue) simply in order to hunt. During Jack's metamorphosis, he also begins to paint his face and body with clay and earth, masking his humanity from the pigs and inspiring terrible awe amongst the boys.

Fatefully, Jack's transition into a demigod puts him on a collision course with Ralph's elected authority. As Jack leaves and takes the majority of the boys with him, lured by the promises of meat, play, and freedom, there has arisen a clear dividing line between the two. Jack represents the irrational nature of the boys while Ralph represents rationality. Under Jack's rule, the baseness of human nature is unleashed, and he initiates a period of inter-tribal violence, punishing other children, inciting the frenzy that leads to the murder of Simon, and torturing the twins until they submit to his authority.

The tale ends with Jack leading many of the boys in a frenzied attempt to kill Ralph. At this time, the last remaining vestiges of civilization are gone, and Ralph's demise is only prevented by the abrupt and unexpected arrival of a naval officer.[10]

[edit] Roger

Roger, at first, is a simple "bigun" who's having fun during his stay on the island. Along with Maurice, he destroys the sand castles made by three small children. While Maurice feels guilt for kicking sand into a child's eye, Roger begins to throw stones at one of the boys, although the book states that Roger clearly threw the stones to miss, and felt the presence of civilization and society preventing him from harming the children [21]. Later, once he feels that all aspects of conventional society are gone, he is left alone to his animal urges. During another pig hunt, Roger shoves a sharpened stick up the animal's rectum while it is still alive[22]. He kills Piggy with a stone that was no longer aimed to miss, and becomes the executioner and torturer of Jack's tribe. In the final hunt for Ralph at the end of the novel, Roger is armed with "a stick sharpened at both ends,"[23] indicating his intentions of killing Ralph and offering his head as a sacrifice to the "beast". He represents the person who enjoys hurting others, and is only restrained by the rules of society.[24]

[edit] Simon

Simon is a character who represents peace and tranquility and positivity, with some references to Jesus Christ. He is very in-tune with the island, and often experiences extraordinary sensations when listening to its sounds. He loves the nature of the island. He is very positive about the future. He also has an extreme aversion to the pig's head, the "Lord of the Flies", which derides and taunts Simon in a hallucination. After this experience, Simon emerges from the forest to tell the others that the "beast" that fell from the sky is actually a deceased parachutist caught on the mountain, only to be brutally killed by the boys, who ironically mistake him for the beast and kill him in their "dance" in which they "ripped and tore at the beast". It is strongly implied that Ralph, Piggy, Sam and Eric partake in the killing. The final words that the Lord of the Flies had said to Simon vaguely predicted that his death was about to occur in this manner. Earlier in the novel Simon himself also predicts his own death when he tells Ralph that he'll "get back all right"[25], implying that, of the two of them, only Ralph will be saved. Simon's death represents the loss of truth, innocence and common sense.[10]

[edit] Naval Officer

Arriving moments before Ralph's seemingly impending death, the Royal Navy officer is surprised and disappointed to learn that the boys' society has collapsed into chaos. He states that he would have expected "a better show"[26] from the British children. The sudden looming appearance of an adult authority figure instantly reduces the savagery of the hunt to a brutal children's game. Upon the officer asking who is in charge, Ralph answers loudly, "I am" [27], and Jack, who was previously characterized as a powerful leader, is reduced to "A little boy who wore the remains of an extraordinary black cap on his red hair and who

carried the remains of a pair of spectacles at his waist"[28]. In the last sentence, the officer, embarrassed by the distress of the children, turns to look at the cruiser from which his party has landed — a symbol of his own adult war.

[edit] The Beast

The Beast is first mentioned by a littlun and the notion is immediately dismissed by Ralph. The Beast is thought to be within the water and described by the littluns as such. Soon after the rumours of the Beast begin to flourish, the corpse of a fighter pilot, ejected from his aircraft, falls to the island. His parachute becomes entangled in the jungle foliage in such a way that sporadic gusts of wind cause the chute to billow and the body to move as if still alive. Sam and Eric discover the parachutist in the dark and believe that it is the beast. Ralph, Jack and Roger search for the Beast and encounter it on the mountain, as well. The reality of the Beast is now firmly established in the boys' minds. Simon discovers the parachutist and realizes that the beast is really only the corpse of a man. Jack's tribe feeds the Beast with the sow's head on a stick. This act symbolizes Jack's willingness to succumb to the temptation of animalism.

Simon is the first child on the island to realize that the Beast is created by the boys' imagination. Simon's realization of this shows that he is naturally good at heart. Simon decides that "the news must reach the others as soon as possible"[29]. Meanwhile, the boys have been feasting and begin to do their tribal pig-hunting dance. When "the beast stumble[s] in to the horseshoe" [30], the frenzied, terrified boys "leapt on to the beast, screamed, struck, bit, tore"[31]. It becomes clear that the boys have mistaken Simon for the beast and murdered him both when Golding describes "Simon's dead body move[ing] out towards the open sea"[32], and on the morning after when Ralph tells Piggy, "That was Simon. [...] That was murder".[33]

[edit] The Lord of the Flies

Namesake of the novel, the Lord of the Flies is literally a pig's head that has been cut off by Jack, put on a stick sharpened at both ends, stuck in the ground, and left as an offering to the "beast". Created out of fear, the Lord of the Flies used to be a mother sow who, though at one time clean, loving, and innocent, has now become a manically smiling, bleeding last image of horror. Near the end of the book, while Ralph is being hunted down, he strikes this twice in one moment of blind anger, causing it to crack and fall on the floor with a grin "now six feet across".[34] This transformation clearly represents the transformation that Jack and the boys have undergone during their time in the island. In addition, the name "Lord of the Flies" is the literal English translation of Beelzebub, a demonic figure that is often considered synonymous with Satan. This discreet knowledge allows the boys descent into material savagery and mysticism further parallel the allegory of the story with western patriarchal society.

[edit] Film adaptations

There have been three film adaptations:

- *Lord of the Flies* (1963), directed by Peter Brook
- *Lord of the Flies* (1990), directed by Harry Hook
- *Alkitrang dugo* (1976), a Filipino film

[edit] Influence

Many writers have borrowed plot elements from *Lord of the Flies*.

[edit] Music

- Steve Harris and Janick Gers of the English heavy metal band Iron Maiden composed a **1995 song** about the novel.

- The final song on U2's 1980 debut album takes its title, "**Shadows and Tall Trees**", from Chapter 7 in the book. Additionally, some printings of the book's cover are similar to the album cover artwork.[35]
- The Offspring referenced the novel in the song "You're gonna go far, Kid" in 2008

[edit] Printed works

The 1961 novel *The Butterfly Revolution*, by William Butler, is described on its front cover as being a "classic in the tradition of *Lord of the Flies*."[36]

Stephen King has stated that the Castle Rock in *Lord of the Flies* was the inspiration for the town that has appeared in a number of his novels. The book itself also appears prominently in his novels *Hearts in Atlantis* (1999), *Misery* (1987) and *Cujo* (1981).[37] King's fictional town, in turn, inspired the name of Rob Reiner's production company, Castle Rock Entertainment, which produced the 1990 film.

[edit] Television

The "Das Bus" episode (1998) of The Simpsons is based on this book: schoolchildren are alone on a remote island, there is a presumed "monster", Milhouse's glasses are used to light a fire, and many other references are present. A previous episode, "Kamp Krusty" (1992), also has several elements from *Lord of the Flies*: a pig's head on a spear, children using primitive weapons and wearing war paint, and a burning effigy.

In the South Park episode "The Wacky Molestation Adventure" (2000), the town's children are left alone and quickly devolve into two savage tribes: one benevolent (led by Stan Marsh) and the other brutal (led by Eric Cartman).

The Two And A Half Men episode, 'The Salmon Under My Sweater' references to the novel, as Jake has to read it for his homework.

In an episode of Spongebob Squarepants, Spongebob, Patrick, and Squidward get lost and ask a 'magic conch shell' where all their decisions are decided by a plastic conch toy. This is a satire of the conch shell that symbolizes leader ship in the novel.

[edit] See also

- *Heart of Darkness*
- Island mentality
- *Two Years' Vacation*

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